



Merced de Santo Tomás Apóstol del Río de las Trampas
P.O. Box 142
Chamisal, New Mexico 87521

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May 8, 2026

United States House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Subject: Support for H.R. 2785, New Mexico Land Grant-Mercedes Historical or Traditional Use Cooperation and Coordination Act

Rep. Bruce Westerman, Chairman, and Rep. Jared Huffman, Ranking Member
House Committee on Natural Resources Rep. Tom Tiffany, Chairman, and Rep. Joe Neguse, Ranking
Member, House Subcommittee on Federal Lands

Dear Mr. Chairman and Mr. Ranking Member,

The Santo Tomás Apóstol del Río de las Trampas Land Grant is writing this letter in support of the passage of H.R. 2785, New Mexico Land Grant-Mercedes Historical or Traditional Use Cooperation and Coordination Act introduced by Rep. Teresa Leger Fernández of New Mexico's 3rd Congressional District. We feel that this is an important piece of legislation that will protect our communities access to the U.S. Forest Service lands that surround us. Since 1751, when Spain granted our ancestors the Santo Tomás Apóstol del Río de Las Trampas Land Grant, our communities have depended on the mountains that surround us for resources, especially firewood that we use to heat our homes. Our communities of Las Trampas, El Valle, Ojito, Ojo Sarco, Llano de San Juan Nepomuceno, Chamisal, Cañada de los Alamos, and Diamante are surrounded completely by U.S. Forest Service lands, like boats adrift in a sea of pine trees.

Our communities lost ownership and access to these lands, originally some 28,131 acres, when our land grant was made vulnerable to land speculators by the incorrect nature of the recognition of our land rights under the U.S. land adjudication process. When our land grant was confirmed, the federal government erred in considering our grant a "tenancy in common," a property status that did not exist under Spain or Mexico, rather than correctly recognizing our communal land as commonly owned. The tenancy in common status considered the commons as owned by a group of individuals that held an equal divisible interest in the land. This exposed our ancestors to a land partition suit, which was filed in 1900. By 1903, the Las Trampas Land Grant sold at a public auction to an outside land speculator for \$17,012 and, after back taxes and attorney fees were paid to attorneys who acted against our communities' interest, our ancestors received a measly \$25 for their communal patrimony. Bond sold the grant to the Las Trampas Lumber Company, which, in 1907, sued to quiet title. Our families fought to secure title to nearly 7,000 acres of private tracts and use rights to the common lands. When the Las Trampas Lumber Company declared bankruptcy in 1926, the George E. Breece Lumber Company bought the grant for \$62,320 and immediately sold it to the U.S. Forest Service for \$75,000 worth of standing timber in the Zuni Mountains near Grants, New Mexico. When the Forest Service bought our grant, they ignored the user agreements that our ancestors negotiated with the Las Trampas Lumber Company that allowed access to the common lands for grazing, fuelwood, and unmerchantable timber for fenceposts,